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The Sermon of 25 September 1983

Although it is true that Jesus Christ was sent to the whole world, to bring the Good News to all peoples and nations, it must be recognised that he also had his own country here on earth. A particular country, with its own history, religion and culture. He freely accepted some of the laws of his country, in spite of the fact that no man-made law could be binding upon God made man. By this he wanted to underline how important it is for us to realise that we all have a country of our own. All human beings are intimately connected with their respective countries, through their families and their place of birth.

Our country, our Fatherland, our own native culture, every event in its history, be it a source of joy or grief, is our common heritage. The riches of our language, our works of art and music, our religion and our customs, are all a part of it.

I invite you to ponder awhile in our meditation today upon this word 'culture'. I realise that it is as vast as the ocean. I shall therefore try to point out only certain aspects of it, certain problems

connected with this complex word.

Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, said to a gathering of young people: 'Culture is a manifestation of the human spirit in men. It is a confirmation of their humanity. Man creates culture and through culture forms himself. Culture is the common good of the nation..

The spiritual welfare of Poland depends on our Polish culture. It speaks for us and has formed us through the long centuries of our national existence, much more than our material wealth or our political frontiers. Thanks to our culture, this nation of ours remained faithful to itself in spite of losing its political independence for a very long time. It remained spiritually independent, because our culture ensured its survival.

From the very beginning our culture bears distinctive marks of Christianity. Christianity has always been present in it, whether in the history of our thought, art, poetry, music, drama or whatever. Throughout our history it has always received inspiration from the pages of the Gospels: Our great poet and seer, Adam Mickiewicz(1798-1855), wrote in The Books of the Polish Pilgrims: 'The only culture truly worthy of man is Christian Culture:

Thanks to Christianity we formed close ties with the culture of Western Europe and, thus armed, we were able to resist various attempts in our history to 'convert' us into other brands of culture by foreign invaders.

It was decided after the war that there would be no place in Polish national life for God or the Gospel. The young especially were to be brought up as if God did not exist. Those responsible for such measures evidently forgot that God is under

no obligation to respect rules invented by men. What is important today is to claim with great courage the rights due to us 'as a nation: the right to God, to love, to freedom of conscience, to our culture and to our national heritage~ A nation cannot advance into the future if it cuts itself off from its past and it should be remembered that the road upon which we have walked as a nation is a Christian road. It is unwise to sever the roots of a past lasting more than a thousand years. The tree without roots will soon be toppled over; we have had some examples of that happening during the last twenty years or so. .

One cannot expect that a nation can abandon its past and start again from scratch. And we must not remain silent when our culture, our art and literature, is treated with contempt by those responsible for the education of our children; when Christian morality is replaced by a dubious socialist morality; when teachers in Warsaw schools openly declare to Christian parents that their children's education will be secularised.

To ban Christian truths, which for centuries have formed an intimate part of our national life, from the presence of children is to begin the destruction of their national identity. The school must teach our young people to love their country, to be proud of their national heritage. It cannot be an institution which is set up by the State for today only. The school must preserve and teach the vital link which binds our tomorrow with our yesterday. When our schools fail in this vital area of national life, the task becomes the duty and added responsibility of the Christian family. The culture of a nation is also its morality. A Christian nation must be guided by our

centuries-old and proven Christian morality. A Christian nation has no need of so-called secular morality, which, in the words of the late Cardinal Wyszyński, has no face and offers no hope. It creates a permanent threat to all the spiritual values of a nation and weakens the forces binding it together.

Our nation refused to lie down and die in spite of being torn to pieces, in spite of failing in one insurrection after another, in spite of numerous deportations to the frozen wastes of Siberia, in spite of the ruthless and relentless campaign to denationalize us and turn us into Russians ... How did we manage to resist the attempts of so many for so long? Because we had roots deep in our national past. Our nation could not be annihilated because it drew nourishment and found sustenance in our history and in our culture.

What kind of nourishment will be available to us in the near future if we agree to what is being 'prepared' for us now? Will it be possible for us to live on the lies published, daily and weekly, by Rzeczpospolita, Trybuna Ludu or Argumenty [Polish government newspapers]? On the shameful way our young are deprived of their national heritage, of their glorious history? On teaching methods designed to erase certain historical events from our national consciousness? How can all that provide a solid foundation for our future? What kind of spiritual food is being prepared for us by slandering Solidarność, by false imputations and harassment of its democratically elected leaders, by banishing crucifixes from OUT schools and workshops - a deplorable act our bishops are particularly concerned about?

All measures taken against our national culture

cannot but be detrimental to our development, and this includes, in a Christian country, a style of government and administration contrary to Christian principles and which tramples upon the fundamental rights of the individual and the family. Only a spiritually independent and truth-loving nation can survive and create cultural sustenance for future generations. It was given to us by our freedom fighters dying on the field of the battle. It was to be found in the works of prophetic poets who saw into the distant future, such as Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849). Living in exile, he was capable of seeing far ahead in time a free Poland – though Poland was then erased from the map of Europe- and a Polish Pope on the throne of St Peter. Only a nation healthy in its spirit and endowed with a sensitive conscience can look to a brave and smiling tomorrow.

Let us therefore take care to preserve our spiritual independence; we must not be defeated by fear or external threats. We must never let poison infect the soul of our nation. Adam Mickiewicz warned us: Siberia is nothing,
the whip is nothing,
but the Nation's spirit poisoned-
this is the pain of pains ...

Paweł Włodkowic [Polish lawyer and legate to the Council of Constance, 1414-8] said that cultural values and spiritual power are not to be secured by fire and sword, by oppression and violence, but by freedom, love and respect for the law.

You win people over with an open heart and not with a clenched fist. True knowledge, true wisdom, true culture do not tolerate chains. One cannot enslave a human mind. Hence we view with astonishment such facts as are known to us. For

example, a world-famous professor has far less influence than administrative minions. What's more, and what's worse, according to the late Cardinal Wyszyński the State employs special 'inspectors' whose duty it is to see that men of knowledge and of science think 'correctly' - that is, not in accordance with the truth but in accordance with the party line.

Any attempt to restrict the freedom of the human mind, which is the creator of culture, is the enemy of all culture. This was brought home to the intellectuals by the patriotic movement of Polish workers in August 1980. Suddenly actors, journalists, writers, poets and painters understood. Their conscience woke up; the national conscience had, all along, been kept in suspended animation by the authorities. The year 1980 was a difficult one, but many positive traits of our nation were revealed: prudence, discretion, skill and an ability to work together. The social, professional, economic, cultural and political conscience came to life again. As did the conscience of our creative community. From now on they spoke with their own voice. They decided to serve the truth with all their talent and ability. To serve the truth in the country of our grandfathers. To serve our country, Poland, without any qualifying epithets.

But where a lie is officially cultivated, so to speak, there is hardly any room for the truth, which contradicts and exposes all lies for what they really are.

And so a new campaign began to take shape, stifling the truth, curbing the freedom of speech, the free and serious exchange of views that had been given full voice under the influence of this newly reborn conscience. Any attempt to invoke

human rights was suddenly considered inspired by enemy action. And yet it was in 1978 that the Primate of Poland had written to the then Minister for Church Affairs, Mr. Kąkol:

The defence of human rights cannot be considered as a political activity par excellence because surely it is the duty of the citizen. The enemies of the socialist state are to be found within the ranks of those keeping cowardly silence and not amongst those who yearn to know the truth about Poland, the truth crippled and contaminated by official teaching ...

The thing about conscience is, once it awakes, it finds little difficulty in telling the wheat from the chaff. It will readily understand that big slogans and streaming banners as a kind of national panacea are empty of meaning when at the same time innocent people are being kept in prison because they have shown their concern for the common good, when new arrests are being made and people are being sacked from their jobs, when special detachments of militia are created to follow and monitor the life of the citizens.

During the recent past creative people became an example to us all, especially actors, who since the fateful events of 13 December 1981 have shown an extraordinary, in our post-war years, strength of spirit, courage and generosity.

Today our Church looks with misgivings upon new dangers threatening the progress of our national culture.

Our bishops have said many times that to achieve a real social consensus, religion and culture are indispensable. It is therefore absolutely essential to secure complete freedom for the development of religious and cultural life. A good example of

this would be to allow the publication of Catholic newspapers to proceed unhampered ,in accordance with the needs of the faithful and to guarantee that there is a pluralism of views in all areas of the creative arts.

In February of this year the authorities expressed concern that the creative community, whose active participation in the life of the country was considered indispensable , was seething with problems. It was said that people engaged in cultural work and in the arts should have reasonable conditions of life, work and association. How unintelligible and damaging, then, in the light of this, are the decisions to ban existing associations of creative people like actors and journalists, and, lately, writers: the Writers Union, established sixty years ago by Stefan Żeromski, a candidate for the Nobel prize for literature in 1924, has been dissolved by the authorities. These decisions are not understood and are a source of grief, especially because the charters of these banned associations were originally approved by the same authorities and none of them changed anything in their statutes during the period of martial law. How are we to understand the declaration made by the Military Council for National Salvation that all associations temporarily suspended will be able to resume their activity within the bounds of their statutes?

It is also quite clear that cultural development is not advanced by the existence of all-powerful censorship which persecutes the press, especially the Catholic press (not the pseudo-Catholic papers) by cutting out words, phrases and complete articles, every true and brave utterance. It cuts and destroys what is written by an honest pen

dipped in the truth. And it should be obvious that words, if they are to live, must be true. Lying words, more often than not, appear as contemptible rubbish the next day in spite of the efforts to flood the readers with papers with circulations running into millions of copies. Our Catholic papers, victimised by the brutality of censorship, will make a poor historical record. Let's face it, culture means honest dialogue and the frank exchange of views, an honest battle of words - not the habitual rantings of official polemicists, who one-sidedly cover their opponents in mud through all the mass media freely open to them.

Let us finish our reflection today with words our Holy Father used when praying to Mary, Holy Mother of God, on 31 March 1982:

Into your hands, O Mother of Jasna Góra, we place the present day and the tomorrow of our national culture. Let our national life continue to grow in it and develop to the full...